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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 09 DAMASCUS 000139

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [ELAB](#) [KCRM](#) [KFRD](#) [KWMN](#) [KTIP](#) [PREF](#) [SMIG](#)  
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SUBJECT: SYRIA: 2008 TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS REPORT

REF: 08 STATE 00132759

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¶1. (U) The following is Post's submission of the annual trafficking in persons report. The Embassy's point of contact is Anthony A. Deaton. Office telephone: (963) (11) 3391-3207. Fax: (963) (11) 3391-3999. The officer spent 35 hours in preparation of the report, which is structured to answer reftel.

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CHECKLIST  
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¶2. (SBU) 23.A: The Syrian Arab Republic government (SARG) has not, traditionally, made information publicly available on police activities in general. Regarding trafficking in persons (TIP) cases, the relevant government offices and police authorities do not have sufficient training and experience to assess trafficking problems in the country accurately enough to make them a reliable source of information. As a result, there are no reliable statistics. Post sources on TIP come from a range of local human rights contacts, lawyers, and women's issues advocates, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) (protect), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) (protect), the International Office for Migration (IOM) (protect), and other members of the international diplomatic community. Post considers the aforementioned sources to be trustworthy. We note, however, that UNHCR, UNRWA, and IOM do not want to be named in any State Department reporting critical of the Syrian government for fear it will seriously jeopardize their future access to Syrian government officials and undermine their work in the country (COMMENT: Post concurs with these organizations' concerns. END COMMENT). Currently, there is an anti-trafficking law pending review and revision by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Parliament. This law, if passed, would represent the first law in the country providing a legal foundation for defining TIP and a framework within which law enforcement could take action against traffickers. At this stage it cannot be presumed

passage of such a law would mean that the SARG would be forthcoming with numbers of cases pursued or victims assisted.

¶3. 23.A-Continued: In an effort to further document TIP issues, Post has informed our international NGO contacts of our desire to begin the first cautious steps of establishing a professional rapport with our Syrian counterparts. While we doubt the government will offer Post any reliable information on TIP issues, we believe that a fuller explanation of the TIP report, the significance of the tier system, and the USG's interest in seeing SARG officials champion anti-TIP measures that will protect victims, will encourage the SARG to commit to anti-trafficking legislation and long-term capacity building strategies with relevant public and private sector actors.

¶4. (SBU) 23.B: Consistent with the 2007 TIP report, Post sources contend that in 2008 Syria was not a country of origin for trafficking, nor was trafficking systematic throughout the country. While there is prostitution in the major cities, it is difficult to discern what percentage of prostitutes were trafficked. Nor was there any official information on whether women, Syrian or foreign, were trafficked internally for purposes of sex work or other forms of forced labor. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there may be as many as several thousand women who fall into this category. Given the size of the domestic-worker market and the laxity of government oversight of recruitment agencies, it is likely most instances of trafficking in Syria are labor-oriented. According to a January 12 article in the Jakarta Post, the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration reported that 75,000 Indonesians working without documents in Syria had requested assistance from the

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ministry with the process of "legalization." In the same article, Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Otri claimed there were only 7,000 illegal migrants currently working in Syria. Sources state, however, that individuals trafficked into the country (especially from Iraq) for purposes of sex or labor might be subject to further trafficking within the country's national boundaries. UNHCR identified 800 Iraqi women in Syria in 2008 who were victims of sexual gender-based violence; it could not confirm, however, how many were victims of trafficking. There have been no substantive changes since the 2007 TIP report.

¶5. (SBU) 23.C: Anecdotal evidence from Embassy sources suggest that most trafficking victims are women forced into domestic labor or prostitution. There are two categories of trafficking victims associated with sex-oriented entertainment. First, there are women from Eastern Europe, former Soviet states, Somalia, and Morocco who are employed as dancers and then forced to live in unacceptable conditions due to their low wages. Their employers, it has been reported, hold their passports and restrict the number of hours the dancers can leave the work premises. The women are coerced by their employers to prostitute themselves in order to improve their living standards. There are no official estimates on the numbers. The second group of women affected by the sex-trade are economically deprived Iraqis. There are no official estimates on the numbers. Complicating the matter is that some Iraqi women and girls who turn to prostitution out of economic desperation are then trafficked back into Syria after they are arrested and deported from Syria. Anecdotal evidence suggests Iraqi families arrange for young girls to work in clubs and to be "married," often multiple times, to men for the sole purpose of prostitution. We lack, however, any reliable estimates. The working and living conditions for these women are probably similar to those experienced by Eastern Europeans and women from former Soviet states. Further, some of the Iraqi women are trafficked through Syria to Kuwait, Dubai, and Lebanon.

¶6. (SBU) 23.C-Continued: While the prostitution industry is the more high-profiled destination for trafficked women,

domestic labor industry is arguably the most common destination. Many women are recruited to work in Syria as domestic servants from Southeast Asia and Ethiopia. There are reports from NGOs that sometimes these women are forced to live like captive slaves with the families they serve. When they arrive in the country, either the recruitment agency or the hiring family keeps the women's passports. This tactic prevents women who are subjected to lower-than-promised pay and/or physical violence from leaving their employers.

¶7. (SBU) 23.D: Embassy contacts contend that Iraqi refugee women and girls are the most vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of sex due to the economic hardships they face in Syria (and Iraq). Economically deprived women from Eastern Europe, former Soviet States, and parts of Africa are also vulnerable. In July 2007, The Ukrainian news outlet Kiev Unian broke up a trafficking ring and discovered that five women from Kyiv were "sold to a brothel in Damascus" where they had to work for four months. The women most vulnerable to being trafficked for labor are from rural Southeast Asia and East Africa. Again, these women are at risk primarily because they come from impoverished areas and are lured by the temptation of a gainful employment. IOM reported that some individuals, both men and women, who are transiting Syria in search of employment in Turkey or Europe, become vulnerable to trafficking when they run out of travel funds and find themselves trapped in Syria when they are unable to make it to the Turkish border.

¶8. (SBU) 23.E: Employers from both Syria and the women's home countries reportedly recruit the women as dancers and have

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them sign a contract that stipulates a very low wage in Syria with the understanding that they will be paid more under the table upon arrival. Once they arrive, the dancers are told they can earn additional money from prostitution, especially during the three or so hours they are authorized to leave the club each day. International organizations have, by and large, not focused on the issue of Eastern European women trafficked to Syria as dancers. Post has an unreliable estimate that several hundred women may be employed thusly in unacceptable conditions.

¶9. (SBU) 23.E-Continued: While there are reports that Iraqi and Syrian gangs work alone and in tandem in trafficking women for the sex industry, government and law enforcement authorities have not presented any quantifiable evidence on gang activity. One local businessman told us that there were 50 "casinos" operating beyond the mountains north of Damascus. These "casinos" were unlicensed joint ventures between the Syrian and resident-Iraqi mafias that exploited young Iraqi and Moroccan girls in brothel-like conditions. The explanations for the conditions under which these women and girls entered the country vary widely. Many point to the gangs. Others state that in some cases Iraqis (both men and women) bring Iraqi women and girls into Syria who are falsely listed as wives and daughters on the traffickers' passports. In other cases, a trafficker may legally bring an Iraqi woman who is his wife through a "pleasure marriage," (which can be quickly and easily solemnized and then dissolved) to Syria and then transfer her to the proprietor of a nightclub or brothel. There are even more extreme anecdotal reports wherein desperate Iraqi families abandon their children at the border with the expectation that traffickers on the Syrian side will pick them up and arrange forged documents so the young women and girls can stay in Syria in exchange for working in a nightclub or brothel. In still other cases, the traffickers may seek new passports for the women and girls before "selling" them to third-country nationals for employment in Lebanon, Dubai, and Kuwait.

¶10. (SBU) 23.E-Continued: Throughout the Syria, there are dozens of unlicensed domestic labor recruitment agencies that lure women to Syria with false promises about the quality of

life and work as a domestic (Note: the governments of Sri Lanka, Indonesia, East Timor, and the Philippines ban their citizens from taking employment as domestic workers in the country, absent formal mechanisms to regulate such employment, although at least with regard to Indonesians and Sri Lankans, the ban has not stopped the flow of workers into the country.) Recruitment agencies and/or employers maintain custody of the women's passports and force them to work long hours, often without providing living quarters that would guarantee personal privacy. An officer at IOM told us that these women are sometimes given rooms hardly larger than a closet, too small for either a bed or to fully recline. In addition, the workers are often not allowed to leave the residence in which they are employed. There were reports that employers sometimes beat domestic workers who disobeyed their orders. Some women do manage to escape their employers, however, and an informal network of escapees has formed to assist each other. IOM estimated approximately 17,000 Philippine women were loosely connected in a network that provides assistance to escapees from abusive domestic labor situations.

¶11. (SBU) 24.A: During the year, the SARG showed increasing awareness that TIP was a problem in the country that required official action. This was reflected in the draft legislation currently under review and revision with the Cabinet and Parliament. Further, the SARG (through the offices of the Ministry of Social Affairs) worked with a local NGO on TIP issues; this included donating building space in Damascus and Aleppo for the opening of the first-ever shelters dedicated to assisting female victims of trafficking.

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¶12. (SBU) 24.B: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA), the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), and the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) are the four government bodies working most directly on anti-trafficking efforts. On victim assistance programs, the MSA is the SARG's designated lead agency for this issue, and throughout the year had a good working relationship with local NGOs. On enforcement issues, the MOI has taken the lead. The MOI claims it has, along with the police, worked hard to prosecute individuals for crimes associated with domestic labor trafficking. Our contacts believe, however, that any cases brought against such individuals will be weak given that no anti-trafficking law yet exists. Finally, the Syrian Parliament has worked closely with the IOM on drafting the current anti-trafficking legislation under review/revision.

¶13. (SBU) 24.C: The biggest obstacle to SARG action against trafficking in persons is the lack of an anti-trafficking law. Without a law, police have no standard upon which to identify potential victims and little incentive to investigate any organized criminal activity in this area. The SARG is aware of this conundrum and is prepared to allow its police to participate in an IOM-designed capacity-building training program aimed at helping law enforcement identify and assist victims of trafficking. Post has no information on how the SARG will dedicate funding to TIP issues. Culturally, TIP-related issues raise the risk of embarrassment to a conservative society that does not address labor or sexual exploitation publicly. It is probable that TIP will be a front-burner issue for the SARG only to the extent that TIP-programs are financed by non-Syrian actors/agencies.

¶14. (SBU) 24.C-Continued: On December 3-4, 27 members of the Syrian Parliament and other SARG officials participated in an IOM-sponsored consciousness-raising workshop on TIP issues. This workshop was intended as a follow-up to a 2007 workshop with Parliament that focused on how to draft counter-trafficking legislation.

¶15. (SBU) 24. D: For the past two years, the SARG has enforced Decree 81, which was issued in 2006 to regulate the

activities of domestic worker agencies. Because there is little transparency in law enforcement operations, the number of arrests and convictions remained unknown at year's end. Although in the past we reported that there were no reports of government corruption connected to the enforcement of Decree 81, we learned this year that the SARG dismissed 12 individuals from government positions on the grounds of corruption connected to the enforcement of the law. The IOM estimated that in 2008, as in 2007, there were five registered domestic worker agencies operating legally in the country and many more operating illegally. Post has learned from contacts that when women are arrested for prostitution and subsequently identified as victims of trafficking (usually by nuns who have access to detention centers), they permit UNHCR and IOM to refer these women to shelters and/or coordinate with the women's home country governments to facilitate safe return to their homes. With Iraqi women this intercession is critical in that deportation could lead to their being re-trafficked back into Syria.

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INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF TRAFFICKERS  
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¶16. (SBU) 25.A: Syria has no laws that specifically prohibit trafficking in persons, although there is a 1961 anti-prostitution law that imposes punishment and criminalizes bringing people into the country for the purpose of prostitution, according to an IOM-sponsored study. Moreover, for individuals who facilitate travel of Syrian

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women abroad to work as prostitutes, article 3 of Law 10 (1961) stipulates imprisonment of one to five years and a fine of 1,000 to 5,000 Syrian pounds (about \$20 to \$100). If more than one victim is involved, or if the victim is less than 16 years old or is a paid servant, the maximum sentence increases to seven years. Direct text follows.

"Whoever entices a male under the age of 21 or a female of whatever age to leave the United Arab Republic (Note: Egypt and Syria were one country at the time), facilitates his/her departure, uses or accompanies him/her abroad to work in prostitution, and all those knowing the purpose of the departure and who assist in the process, shall be given a one to five-year imprisonment and a fine of 1,000 to 5,000 Syrian pounds (approximately \$20 to \$200), and the maximum penalty would be imprisonment of seven years if the crime was committed against two or more persons."

¶17. (SBU) 25.A-Continued: There are other legal texts in Syria that could further augment the anti-trafficking law currently in draft form, according to IOM. For instance, Section 555 of the General Penal Code states "whoever incarcerates another person will be subjected to a prison sentence of six months to two years." Section 556 states that "if the incarceration (of the victim by perpetrator) lasts for more than one month or includes torture, the sentence will include hard labor." Decree 29 of 1970, which regulates the immigration of foreigners, stipulates that "any foreigner who tries to enter the country with false documentation and anyone who may have aided that foreigner is subject to imprisonment of three months to one year and a fine of 500 Syrian Pounds (\$10) to 2,000 (\$40)." In practice, however, these laws are not targeted toward, or enforced against, traffickers.

¶18. (SBU) 25.A-Continued: In addition, the Syrian Constitution provides for regulation of working hours. Decree 81 of 2006 regulates domestic worker agencies and provides general guidelines for employee contracts. The decree stipulates that worker rights be respected, especially "provision of clothing, food, medicine, acceptable place for sleep and rest of the worker," the payment of "the monthly salary at the end of each month," "sufficient periods for rest and annual leave," and that the employer not "abuse or



beat (the employee) under the threat of judicial prosecution in accordance with the existing laws and regulations."

¶19. (SBU) 25.A-Continued: The General Penal Code also provides punishments for the exploitation of prostitution by force, fraud, and/or coercion.

--Article 510 states: "Whoever attempts to seduce or take away a girl or woman under/above the age of 21, with or without her consent, by means of deception, violence, threats, use of force or other compulsory means shall receive a three-year imprisonment and a fine of 300 Syrian Pounds (\$6)."

¶20. (SBU) 25.B: There are no prescribed or imposed penalties for trafficking people for the purpose of sex. As stated above, several articles of the General Penal Code, however, could be applied to trafficking cases.

¶21. (SBU) 25.C: There are no prescribed or imposed penalties for trafficking people for the purpose of labor. Again, some articles of the General Penal Code, as described above, could be used in trafficking cases. Additionally, there are possible punishments for illegally hiring juveniles--namely a fine of up to 1,000 Syrian Pounds (\$20)--but IOM believes them to be an insufficient deterrent.

¶22. (SBU) 25.D: The General Penal Code of 1949, and revised in 1985, outlines penalties for rape and forcible sexual assault. The minimum sentence for rape or sexual assault is

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three years in prison; the maximum sentence is 15 years--or 21 years if the victim is a minor between the ages of 12 and 15. If the victim is less than 12 years old, the minimum sentence is 15 years imprisonment. However, the perpetrator is absolved of all criminal guilt if he agrees to marry the victim. If the victim is too young for marriage, the rapist receives a longer prison sentence. For kidnapping women, the penalty is three to seven years in prison. The penalty for deflowering a virgin is five years. The penalty for molestation of a minor less than 15 years of age is 18 months in prison.

¶23. (SBU) 25.E: Post is unaware of anyone prosecuted for trafficking people for sexual exploitation or for labor during the reporting period.

¶24. (SBU) 25.F: On December 3-4, 2008, IOM held a two-day "consciousness-raising" workshop with members of parliament and other government officials on TIP issues. The government itself has not, to date, provided training on its own. In January 2008, the IOM and MOI conducted training for police, lawyers and judges designed to assist in the identification and assistance of victims of trafficking. In addition, the IOM conducted training in December 2007 began to train MOI immigration officials on border management, including a component on trafficking. This training is on-going. The government agreed to allow IOM to provide future training for government officials and law enforcement agents once the anti-trafficking legislation passed into law.

¶25. (SBU) 25.G: The SARG discussed the issue of cooperation on combating human trafficking with Iraq during a 2006 meeting of Ministers of Interior of Iraq's neighboring countries, but no formal language ever emerged from those talks. In May 2007, the SARG agreed to the additional provisions of the U.N. Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The government did assist foreign embassies and IOM with cases involving trafficked individuals.

¶26. (SBU) 25.H: Post is not aware of any instances where traffickers have been extradited.

¶27. (SBU) 25.I: Post received no evidence of SARG involvement or tolerance of trafficking. While increased international

media stories on Iraqi refugees turning to prostitution has caused the government to look more closely at the small brothel industry here, there was not a concerted and public effort to shut down such establishments during the reporting period.

¶28. (SBU) 25.J: In 2007, according to NGO contacts, the SARG dismissed 12 civil servants implicated in corrupt behavior connected with facilitating the operation of unlicensed domestic labor recruitment agencies. Post was unaware of any criminal prosecutions of government officials for complicity in trafficking-related crimes during the reporting period.

¶29. (SBU) 25.K: The Syrian General Penal Code's Debauchery Law criminalizes prostitution of any kind. Prostitution is defined as occurring when any person "lures, seduces, induces, assists with, or facilitates another person's commitment of fornication or adultery (regardless of whether there was a financial benefit). The penalty for prostitution under the penal code is imprisonment for three months to three years and payment of a fine of 1,000 to 3,000 Syrian Pounds (approximately \$20 to \$60). In the past, Post has received anecdotal reports that cabarets (also locally referred to as "casinos") with dancers who double as prostitutes operated throughout Syria with the knowledge of local police who are bribed to ignore the problem.

¶30. (SBU) 25.L: Syria did not contribute troops to

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international peacekeeping efforts during the reporting year.

¶31. (SBU) 25.M: Post has no direct evidence of child sex tourism in Syria. There are reports, however, that citizens of other Middle Eastern countries visit Syria for sex tourism, partially due to the large influx of Iraqi refugee prostitutes. There is anecdotal evidence from religious workers and NGOs that some of the Iraqi prostitutes are minors. It is unclear to what extent, if any, visitors come to Syria for the express purpose of pursuing sexual relations with underage women.

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PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS  
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¶32. (SBU) 26.A: In the absence of counter-trafficking legislation, the government has no specific legal framework within which it can prosecute trafficking crimes. Therefore, there are no witnesses to be protected. Victims of trafficking are not legally identified as such. While the government might assist them through an informal referral process to NGO-sponsored shelters, it has no existing legal protections to extend. According to NGO contacts, the MOI is considering whether to open a special Trafficking Bureau if the anti-trafficking draft legislation passes into law.

¶33. (SBU) 26.B: There are three main women's shelters in Damascus (anecdotal evidence suggests religious organizations may run several other unlicensed shelters) and one soon to be opened in Aleppo. The first is an unlicensed operation administered by the Catholic Good Shepherd Sisters that operates with the knowledge of the SARG. The second, called "Oasis of Hope," is a licensed shelter dedicated to assisting victims of domestic violence. The third is a shelter for women who are victims of trafficking and it is co-located with the domestic violence shelter. All but Oasis of Hope are open to women of any nationality and religion. Oasis of Hope is theoretically for Syrian women and girls; it also operates a "hotline" for women in distress. The planned Aleppo shelter will also be open to victims of trafficking. The buildings for all but the nuns' shelter were donated to the local implementing NGO by the SARG. The government, however, does not provide direct financial support. In addition to the aforementioned shelters, CARITAS operates two shelters for Iraqi refugees that often take in women who are

victims of domestic violence or trafficking.

¶34. (SBU) 26.C: The aforementioned shelters all offer legal, medical, and psychological counseling. Moreover, Oasis of Hope offers limited vocational training to residents. The government's financial support is limited to the donation of the physical site. The SARG's willingness to work with IOM, UNHCR, and local NGOs is essential for these operations to continue. Our contacts have noted that while the government does not fund their efforts, the moral support of the First Lady, who is well known for her activism on women's and children's issues, has facilitated their operations.

¶35. (SBU) 26.D: The government does not extend temporary or permanent residency status to victims of trafficking, nor do they offer a formal mechanism for relief from deportation. Non-Syrian women arrested for prostitution are detained and eventually deported, usually with the assistance of the relevant embassies. Iraqi women, we have been told, are often simply dropped off at the border, where they are sometimes picked up by gangs and trafficked back into Syria. Since 2007, however, the SARG has worked with the Good Shepherd Sisters, IOM, and UNHCR more closely on this issue. Our contacts reported that in some cases they were allowed to intercede on behalf of detained Iraqi women who were clearly victims of trafficking. In a few instances, the SARG allowed the women to be "referred" to a shelter with no threat of

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deportation.

¶36. (SBU) 26.E: Outside the aforementioned shelters, the government does not offer any other shelter facilities to trafficking victims. Juvenile victims of rape or sexual assault, as well as minors accused of prostitution, are housed in dedicated juvenile detention facilities, which provide health care and vocational training. The SARG permits workers from the Oasis of Hope to assist minors in at least one of the detention centers.

¶37. (SBU) 26.F: The SARG does not have a formal referral process to transfer victims detained or arrested to shelters. Despite this fact, the SARG continues to permit the Good Shepherd Sisters access to women's detention facilities. If the nuns, our contacts reported, identify women and girls as potential victims of trafficking, they contact UNHCR and/or IOM. In the past, based on this informal referral process, the SARG allowed women and girls to be transferred from detention facilities to shelters.

¶38. (SBU) 26.G: Post did not receive any numbers, anecdotal or official, on the number of victims of trafficking during the reporting period.

¶39. (SBU) 26.H: The government's law enforcement, immigration, and social services personnel do not have a formal system of proactively identifying victims of trafficking among those high-risk groups with whom they come into contact.

¶40. (SBU) 26.I: Victims of trafficking are not legally identified as such by the SARG. If arrested for prostitution, the women are detained and, in most cases, are deported. If they are not deported, they would be subject to the legal punishment for prostitution. In some cases embassies and consulates of the victim's country assist with their return to their home country.

¶41. (SBU) 26.J: Because there have been no specific investigations into trafficking crimes per se, Post did not receive any information detailing SARG attempts to work with victims in seeking criminal prosecutions. Decree 81 requires domestic worker agencies to put down a one million USD guarantee, which some contacts in the past have asserted could be used for a victim restitution program.



¶42. (SBU) 26.K: In January 2008, IOM, with the assistance of the MSA and MOI, provided training to judges, lawyers and police on how to recognize and deal with victims of trafficking. In December 2008, IOM conducted another workshop with parliamentarians on trafficking issues and the importance of legislative action. Post has no reports of Syrian embassies abroad providing assistance to Syrian victims of trafficking.

¶43. (SBU) 26.L: Post did not receive information on Syrians trafficked abroad and then repatriated to Syria.

¶44. (SBU) 26.M: The two main international organizations that confront trafficking issues in Syria are the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the U.N. High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). IOM has received grant funding from a range of donors, including the U.S. and the E.U.

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PREVENTION  
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¶45. (SBU) 27.A: During the reporting period, the SARG participated in a December 3-4 2008 IOM-sponsored workshop aimed at educating government officials on trafficking crimes and the importance of anti-trafficking legislation. IOM

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conducted training with Syrian border immigration officials on fraudulent documents that included a trafficking-awareness component with SARG permission. IOM began educational programs with the assistance of local NGOs that focus on raising awareness about illegal domestic labor; this included a component on trafficking. The SARG has not on its own sponsored any educational training of this sort. There were no government-sponsored public information campaigns on the subject.

¶46. (SBU) 27.B: The SARG claims to monitor its borders closely, particularly after the imposition of visa restrictions on Iraqis in October of 2007. The Syria-Iraq border, nevertheless, remains relatively porous. In November 2008, a contact claimed to have walked across the Syrian side of the Syria-Iraq border through private agricultural fields in broad daylight and then was taken by a driver past the Iraqi checkpoint guards, who, having been reportedly bribed in advance, never asked to see a passport. The SARG shares immigration and emigration information selectively and, during the reporting period, did not make such information available to Post.

¶47. (SBU) 27.C: In November of 2007, the UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, United Nations Food Protection Agency (UNFPA), the NGO Bon Pasteur, and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) formed an interagency working group on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SBGV). The group met monthly to address some issues related to trafficking.

¶48. (SBU) 27.D: The SARG has anti-trafficking draft legislation in the revision process with the Cabinet and Parliament. Post did not receive any additional information on a SARG national plan to address trafficking in persons.

¶49. (SBU) 27.E: Prostitution is illegal in Syria. Enforcement, according to contacts, is lax. Beyond the normal day-to-day police arrests of prostitutes (about which Post has no official numbers), the SARG did not take other, noticeable steps to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

¶50. (SBU) 27.F: Post was not aware of any measures the government took to reduce participation in international child sex tourism by nationals of the country during the reporting period. Post was not aware that Syrian nationals have been implicated in any international child sex tourism cases during the reporting period.

